

Southern Illinois University Carbondale OpenSIUC

Higher Education Policy Commentary

School of Architecture

1-2010

Our University – A Vision and a Plan

Walter V. Wendler

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, wendler@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/arch_hepc

Recommended Citation

Wendler, Walter V., "Our University – A Vision and a Plan" (2010). *Higher Education Policy Commentary*. Paper 6.
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/arch_hepc/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Higher Education Policy Commentary by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

Our University – A Vision and a Plan

In order to achieve excellence in such aspects of university life as teaching, scholarly and creative work and service to the professions and community, a vision and plan are essential.

Accrediting agencies seek to understand the university's vision and plan. New and current faculty are interested in how the university sees itself in the future. Students and families want to know about aspirations. Elected and appointed leaders, the good ones, are interested in the long-term perspective of the university, its relationship to the state and its citizens.

Accomplishments not measured against a specific set of targets and goals mean little. A friend used to say, "A blind hog will pick up an acorn every now and again." Even without a vision and a plan something positive might happen. With a vision, and the direction a sound plan provides, the probability of positive movement increases dramatically.

A vision that sees only a few months out, or that is crisis driven, or set up to address a single perspective, or that counts expenditures only in terms of immediate costs rather than long-term benefits, is not a vision at all. It is not a plan either. It is reactionary leadership that will not sustain a university.

Universities, colleges, and community colleges all need a strong vision. The graduation of students who are successful professionally, powerful critical thinkers, and ultimately effective citizens in a free society is difficult to measure in the short term and must be looked at over spans of generations. The true measure of a university's vision and plan comes in the long term success of the student.

If we were producing automobiles, and the machine looked good off the line, had the right price point, fuel efficiency and appeal in the showroom, but were nightmares to maintain, operate, or fell apart after little use, what is gained?

Yugo tried. Yugo failed.

The "Yugoization" of any enterprise leads to failure. Can you imagine the "Yugoization" of a good university, and the long term impact?

Only a vision keeps quality up, serves purpose well, and ultimately benefits the student for life. Like a marriage, the university investment is for life, and a good university instills a bi-directional lifetime commitment: from the institution to the student, and vice versa.

Philanthropy at public and private universities is directly proportional to real and perceived quality.

Our university has an excellent plan, ***Southern at 150: Building Excellence though Commitment***. It is configured to meet the needs of our students, state, region, faculty and staff. It is like no plan for any other university except that it states clearly goals and targets valued by almost all universities but tailors them to the specific opportunities, strengths and characteristics of Southern Illinois University Carbondale. This is what any vision and plan should do.

The vision and plan for a university should be developed with diverse inputs, published for all to see, spread widely, endorsed by its board and serve as a measuring stick and mast for guidance, direction and discussion. It should look out a generation.

That provides transparency in shared aspirations rather than a willy-nilly dance with issues of the day. Issues of the day are critical but must be addressed with foresight focused on mission.

The best universities have the best plans because the university is a “futures machine”.

Leadership is the substance of vision and the cause of a plan.

A university without a vision and a plan will wander and founder.